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The Habitat Restoration Group

JOHN STANLEY & ASSOCIATES, INC.

VISUAL RESOURCES OF COYOTE CREEK
MONTAGUE EXPRESSWAY TO EAST JULIAN STREET
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

PREPARED FOR

Dr. Bernard Goldner
The Santa Clara Valley Water District

PREPARED BY

THE HABITAT RESTORATION GROUP

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ENVPLAN

VISUAL ANALYSIS

GENERAL SETTING

The area surrounding the four mile long segment of Coyote Creek between Montague Expressway and East Julian Street is highly urban, consisting of extensive residential, commercial and industrial development. Aesthetically, Coyote Creek serves as a natural corridor visible from several vantage points within the urban context. The riparian corridor is heavily vegetated throughout much of the project area from Brokaw Road to East Julian Street, creating a continuous narrow greenbelt which stands in dramatic contrast to the surrounding urban environment. The dense riparian forest consists largely of tall cottonwoods, box elder and willow species, with some black walnut, sycamore and oak near the top of bank. The variety of line, form, texture and color of the various vegetation species provide visual interest for viewers from points of public access throughout the project area.

VISUAL ANALYSIS OF COYOTE CREEK

For purposes of this study, the visual components of the project area are described reach by reach, with regard to scenic quality and visual sensitivity from points that provide access for viewers.

Visual resources of each reach were rated with regard to aesthetic value, with higher ratings given to points of visual interest (vegetative diversity, continuity of line and form, and density of vegetation), visual access (public or private vantage points and recreational uses along the corridor such as jogging trails, picnic facilities, park areas, high numbers of viewers, etc.). Lower ratings were given to points of limited visual access such as areas adjacent to commercial and industrial properties, and visually degraded areas such as where trash dumping and vegetation clearing were evident.

Reach 4 - Montague Expressway to Charcot Avenue (4,400 Linear Feet)

The area surrounding Reach 4 is characterized by several high-technology, light-industrial business parks. Vehicular vantage points occur at Montague Expressway and Charcot Avenue. Pedestrian access is restricted on the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) maintenance roads at the top of the east and west banks. However, pedestrian use does occur despite the locked gates and fences. Recreational land use includes adjacent picnic areas on the east side of the creek for business park employees, with views to the creek corridor through a chain-link fence, between Montague Expressway and Charcot Avenue.

Montague Expressway has high levels of traffic moving to and from the many computer related businesses in the area. Coyote Creek at Montague Expressway bridge is a wide corridor composed of a variety of native and non-native vegetation. Views for east-bound motorists on Montague Expressway are generally open toward the south. The modified channel generally contains low-growing groundcovers and small trees and shrubs near the bottom of the channel, with some areas of well established large trees on the upper banks (Figure 1).

Recreational use of the creek includes picnic and barbecue facilities located adjacent to the east bank for employees of one business park. The SCVWD east bank maintenance road is currently used as a jogging trail by many of the business park employees, despite restricted access from locked gates and fences.

The west bank maintenance road was not observed to be used by joggers, presumably due to less accessibility from the business parks, and possibly due to unfavorable views of the adjacent petroleum tanks.

A wide path on the east bank meanders amid a grove of eucalyptus trees for approximately 100 yards south from the Montague Expressway bridge, providing views of the riparian corridor and creek channel. The tops of both the east and west banks are bounded by chain-link fencing. Glimpses of the west bank can be seen from beneath the eucalyptus, providing views of cottonwood and willow vegetation of varying height and density. A short stretch of concrete sandbags occurs at an outfall on the west bank, creating a slight visual disturbance.

South of the eucalyptus grove, the view opens to the entire creek corridor, with views of the widened channel. West bank vegetation consists of cottonwood/willow riparian woodland, with a variety of native and non-native shrubs and emergent vegetation along the lower slopes and in the channel. The visual quality of the combination of native and ruderal species provides diversity of form, texture and color. Within this open area, views of petroleum storage tanks on the east and west banks occur in contrast to the vegetated creek corridor.

On the east bank near Charcot Avenue, the stark appearance of a parking lot is hidden by a canopy of eucalyptus and a screen of vines climbing on the fence.

Frequent recreational use by joggers of Reach 4 is an indication of the aesthetic appeal of the creek. Although this reach is a modified channel with an appearance that is not completely natural, it has a moderate aesthetic value because of the contrast of the natural elements of the creek with the adjacent buildings and petroleum tanks, and the high number of recreational users who view the creek.

Reach 5 - Charcot Avenue to Interstate 880 (1,900 Linear Feet)

Vehicular access to views of Coyote Creek are afforded at Charcot Avenue Bridge on the northern end and O'Toole Avenue, and at Interstate 880 on the southern end of Reach 5. The corridor continues upstream from Reach 4 as a widened channel, with moderately sloping banks of about a 2:1 gradient. Adjacent land use and recreation is similar to Reach 4, where employees of adjacent business parks are afforded views of the creek while walking or jogging on the east-bank maintenance road.

The character of Charcot Avenue is more park-like than industrial. Charcot Avenue is a lateral corridor between the major thoroughfare of O'Toole Road and Junction Avenue. Both the east and west vehicular approaches to the bridge are lined with grassy berms planted with mature landscape trees. The variety of trees provide visual contrast of form, texture and color to the surroundings of Charcot Avenue bridge.

The view south from Charcot Avenue consists of an open channel vegetated with a mix of weeping willow and cottonwood trees, and a variety of native and non-native shrubs farther upstream where vegetation becomes increasingly sparse (Figure 2). The main channel divides into two smaller channels near O'Toole Bridge.

Users of the east-bank maintenance road are afforded views of a variety of low growing herbaceous and shrubby vegetation near the channels. Few overstory trees grow along the top of the east bank near O'Toole Lane. The general appearance of the channel is more open and less vegetated than in the downstream portions.

The view north from O'Toole Bridge is of a widened corridor consisting of a variety of shrubby vegetation along the channel, with a long line of weeping willow rooted along the west bank. The east bank shows recent scars from off-road-vehicles on the middle and lower banks, with a line of large, shrubby willows growing at the toe of the slope and near the channel (Figure 3).

The view south from O'Toole Bridge is of low quality. Both the east and the west slopes are sparsely vegetated with predominantly low growing ruderal plant species. A disruptive view of the Interstate 880 crossing occurs approximately 300 feet south of O'Toole Avenue Bridge. Inaccessibility and low aesthetic quality apparently restrict pedestrian use of the maintenance road south of O'Toole Lane (Figure 4).

Another vehicular vantage point of the Reach 5 corridor occurs north from Interstate 880. The surrounding business parks tend to direct attention away from the corridor. Although the corridor is open and visually accessible, the lack of continuous vegetative overstory makes the creek north of Interstate 880 less visible for high-speed traffic.

Although the aesthetic quality south of O'Toole Lane generally is of lower visual significance, the overall visual resource value for Reach 5 is moderate, due to the numbers of recreational users and business park employees who view the creek, and the moderate visual appeal of the corridor downstream of O'Toole Lane.

Reach 6 - Interstate 880 to Ridder Park Drive (1,400 Linear Feet.)

Interstate 880 offers views of the stream corridor toward the south. Lush stands of cottonwood/willow riparian vegetation occur on the west bank immediately north of Brokaw Road. The east bank adjacent to Brokaw Road is sparsely vegetated.

The intersection of Brokaw Road and Highway 880 is busy, and vehicles are often stopped on the Brokaw Road Bridge at the signal for the 880 on-ramp. Direct visual access over the creek from the vantage point of the bridge includes views of large stands of cottonwood and willow on the north side of Brokaw road. The vegetation of the creek provides a pleasant visual diversion for these viewers (Figure 5).

An open agricultural field which extends from Interstate 880 to Coyote Creek south of Brokaw road offers a broad view of several hundred feet of continuous riparian corridor for vehicular traffic moving east on Brokaw Road, and for traffic from the Interstate 880 off-ramp. This continuous corridor extends from Brokaw Road to Ridder Park Drive (Figure 6).

Because of the number of prominent vehicular vantage points in Reach 6, the generally dense and continuously vegetated riparian corridor, and the vertical contrast of the corridor with the surrounding flat agricultural fields, this reach is of high visual quality.

Reach 7 - Ridder Park Drive to Old Oakland Road (1,800 Linear Feet)

Coyote Creek passes under the Ridder Park Bridge at the northern boundary of Reach 7. Schallenberger Road borders the west bank of the corridor for approximately 2,000 feet, and is the only portion of the study area with parallel vehicular access to the creek (Figure 7).

Composed mainly of cottonwood/willow vegetation along the creek, this area exhibits a diversity of top-of-bank species which provide a dense, continuous backdrop of various form and texture for vehicular traffic on Schallenberger Road, as well as for employees of the various business parks, radio station, and the San Jose Mercury News offices across the street. Recreational use includes a par course and park facilities for employees of San Jose Mercury News, and a landscaped patio and pergola area in front of the radio station offices across Schallenberger Drive. Both of these amenities have views of the creek's dense riparian vegetation across the street.

Closer inspection of the west bank of the creek discloses an abundance of refuse from extensive homeless camps located in the forest. A large grove of diseased elms were observed near the western-most point of Schallenberger Road. These unfavorable elements are probably not readily viewed by motorists and nearby recreationists.

A recycling center on the east bank limits accessibility to the creek. However, because of the high number of users who view the outer portions of the west bank of the creek from adjacent recreational facilities, as well as parallel vehicular access along Schallenberger Drive, Reach 7 has moderate to high visual resource value.

Reach 8 - Old Oakland Road to Berryessa Road
(6,100 Linear Feet)

The majority of Reach 8 is relatively inaccessible to major vehicular traffic within the corridor. Public vehicular access is limited to Old Oakland Road Bridge at the north end of the reach, the east bank entrance road of the San Jose Municipal Golf Course (which parallels the creek for approximately 2,000 feet), a dirt road in the undeveloped park area on the west bank, the Flea Market parking lot, and the bridge at Berryessa Avenue at the south end of the reach.

Adjacent land use on the west bank includes an undeveloped park which extends for approximately 1,500 feet north from Old Oakland Road. South of the park area, a trailer park parallels the creek on the west side of a levee for approximately 2,000 feet, ending at the Union Pacific Railroad. A concrete plant is located south of the railroad tracks and extends south to Berryessa Avenue.

The undeveloped North Coyote Park at the end of Corie Court provides distant views of the creek from Old Oakland Road, and from the adjacent business park. The park land slopes at about a 10% gradient to the creek, with shrub and grassland vegetation occurring in mounds and patches throughout the site. The thickly vegetated, continuous riparian corridor consists predominantly of cottonwood, willow and box elder.

Off-road vehicle enthusiasts use the dirt roads for recreational use, leaving ruts and bare soil in areas (Figure 8). Extensive homeless camps and garbage within the corridor detract from the natural appearance of the riparian woodland, and probably discourage pedestrian use.

At the south end of the park, dirt roads converge onto a gated levee road which parallels the creek and the trailer park. Several creek channels support a continuous, dense cottonwood/willow overstory. The riparian vegetation is clearly visible from the elevated levee road, where local residents occasionally stroll or walk their dogs.

The maintenance road ends south of the trailer park, and homeless camps and refuse occur in the riparian corridor between the concrete batch plant and the railroad tracks. Adjacent to the concrete plant, the creek banks are steep, and littered with concrete, debris, dust and uprooted vegetation. Public access is not available to this area, and the creek is not readily visible from public vantage points.

Along the east bank, the San Jose Municipal Golf Course extends for approximately 3,600 feet south from Old Oakland Road. The Golf Course entrance road, as well as the fairways are bordered on their western edge by riparian forest. Along the main entrance road, the forest extends approximately 20-30 feet out from the top of bank, and the diversity of line, form, color and texture serve to provide visual interest for incoming motorists. A number of snags and summer deciduous California Buckeye provide visual contrast (Figure 10).

South of the golf course, a housing development was under construction during field surveys. Future residents of these homes will gain a view of a disturbed, but continuous riparian corridor, vegetated with trees of varying texture and color (Figure 11).

Further upstream near Berryessa Avenue, a narrow but continuous corridor of mature, predominantly cottonwood and willow overstory is the most prominent natural feature of the area. The expansive parking lot of the flea market has been constructed right up to the base of vegetation rooted at the top of the steep east bank. Litter has blown into the creek from the parking lot, and bags of garbage indicate the creek is being used as a dumping ground. Although this portion of the creek is narrow, and physically degraded, it serves to soften the stark appearance of the parking lot as viewed from Berryessa Avenue (Figure 12).

Visual resources of the northern half of Reach 8 are of very high aesthetic value due to the presence of a wide continuous corridor of trees that are visible to many users of adjacent recreational facilities such as the golf course and the west-bank maintenance road, as well as for future residents of the east-bank housing development.

Although close-up views reveal negative elements such as garbage and litter, the visual resources of the southern half of Reach 8 have a moderate to high value due to the contrast of the narrow, but densely vegetated corridor with less visually appealing surrounding land uses such as the flea market parking lot, and the concrete batch plant.

Reach 9 - Berryessa Avenue to Mabury Road (2,200 Linear Feet)

Vehicular views are limited in Reach 9 due to adjacent industrial and agricultural land uses, and occur only at Berryessa Avenue at the north end, and Mabury Road at the south end of the reach. Significant pedestrian views occur at the Berryessa underpass entrance to the flea market, and on the flea market grounds.

The vehicular view of the creek south from Berryessa Avenue consists of a narrow corridor vegetated with various overstory tree species on the top of bank, and thick, emergent vegetation within the channel.

The west bank of the creek south of Berryessa has been physically degraded by trash dumping and vegetation removal. Surrounding land use includes an access road to the San Jose Tallow Company immediately adjacent the top of the west bank. A six foot wooden fence separates the road from San Jose Self Storage, a storage rental yard.

Pedestrian access from the parking lot to the flea market passes under Berryessa Avenue directly adjacent to the creek corridor. Large numbers of people view the creek from this underpass, making Berryessa Avenue one of the more visually sensitive areas of the creek (Photo 13).

Visual access to the east bank is provided to patrons and sellers of the adjacent Flea Market, Inc. Aesthetic value of the creek channel adjacent to the flea market is relatively poor due to an abundance of garbage and vegetation clearing of banks. The riparian corridor provides a contrasting, natural backdrop to the flea market grounds when viewed from a distance (Photo 14).

The majority of Reach 9 south of the flea market is visually inaccessible to the general public due to the close proximity of adjacent business parks and storage facilities.

The agricultural field north of Mabury Road provides a distant view of about 1,000 feet of the continuous creek corridor for west-bound traffic on Mabury Road. A business park adjacent to the west side of the creek on Mabury Road obstructs vehicular traffic from views of the west side of the creek.

Coyote Creek in Reach 9 provides a continuous, but narrow vegetated corridor within an industrial and commercial environment. Although views of the corridor are restricted throughout much of the reach, the continuous stretch of vegetation provides moderate aesthetic value for employees of the adjacent businesses, as well as for motorists and pedestrians at the above mentioned access points.

Reach 10 - Mabury Road to Highway 101 (1,300 Linear Feet)

South of Mabury Road, the riparian vegetation of predominantly cottonwood and willow form a wide, continuous corridor throughout Reach 10. Adjacent land use includes a recreational storage facility on the west bank, and the City of San Jose Mabury Service Yard on the east bank.

The natural corridor of trees contrasts with the stark appearance of a recreational vehicle storage facility located on the west bank (Photo 15).

Public access to the creek is not available from Mabury Road to Highway 101. Traffic on Highway 101 does have visual access into the corridor, however the speed at which the traffic moves allows little opportunity to view the corridor.

Reach 10 is a short segment with few public visual access points, however the contrast of the dense, continuous corridor with the surrounding land uses have moderate visual resource value.

Reach 11 - Highway 101 to East Julian Street (3,500 Linear Feet)

The creek plays an important role in the visual quality of the Fred Watson Community Center, located on the west bank a few hundred yards upstream from Highway 101. Several large native oaks, sycamores, cottonwoods and walnuts can be seen from the Fred Watson Community Center near Highway 101. Forming a continuous line of vegetation for approximately 1,000 feet, the creek is viewed by users of Watson Park, and students and faculty of the adjacent Empire Gardens Elementary School. The riparian forest extends into the adjacent park, and intermingles with planted windbreaks of pines. Some of the Coast live oak, sycamore and cottonwood specimens appear to be remnants of the original riparian flood plain. These "bands" of trees extend for some 300 feet from the creek to the community center (Photo 16).

Surrounding land use throughout the majority of this reach is primarily residential housing and apartments, with backyards abutting the creek. A picnic and park area at Hidden Brooks Apartments on the east bank provides creekside recreation and visual access, although a chain-link fence separates this area from the dense riparian vegetation within the main channel of Coyote Creek (Photo 17).

The upstream terminus of the project at East Julian Street is composed of lush riparian vegetation which is a contrasting feature of the surrounding commercial environment (Photo 18).

Pedestrian and vehicular access is provided over Julian Street Bridge. Pedestrian use includes students from the adjacent San Jose High School. The approach to, as well as the view from the bridge provide a natural-appearing element in an urban area. Overhead vegetation combined with shallow water and protruding structures in the creek, such as logs, combine to provide a site with diverse elements of high visual interest.

Due to the presence of many highly used access and recreation points which provide views of diverse vegetation and water features within a wide corridor, Reach 11 has very high aesthetic value within the project area with regard to visual resources.

SUMMARY

The Coyote Creek corridor was surveyed for aesthetic value from Montague Expressway to East Julian Street. Each reach within the project area was assigned a value based upon observed visual quality. Higher ratings were given to points of visual interest, visual access, high number of users, and recreational opportunities. Lower ratings were given to areas with limited visual access, and visually degraded areas.

Reach 4, at the beginning of the project area, was given a moderate aesthetic value based upon the reduced visual appeal of the modified channel (as compared with natural-appearing reaches) and relatively high recreational use.

Reach 5 continues upstream as a modified channel, but is of lower visual significance than Reach 4 due to less vegetative diversity, and a higher degree of physical disturbance. Moderate recreational use, as well as a large number of viewers were factors in the designation of a moderate overall rating for visual quality.

Coyote Creek in Reach 6 is crossed by three vehicular access points. The dense riparian corridor is fairly continuous throughout this reach, however the east bank south of Brokaw Road is sparsely vegetated. A moderate to high rating was given to this reach based upon high viewer numbers and prominence of the relatively continuous riparian corridor.

Reach 7 was given a moderate to high visual quality rating based upon parallel visual access from Schallenberger Drive, adjacent recreational facilities on the west bank, and a continuous line of diverse vegetation. Degradation from trash dumping and inaccessibility of the east bank resulted in a moderate to high overall rating.

The northern half of Reach 8 was given a very high visual quality rating, based upon heavy recreational use of the golf course and east-bank maintenance road, adjacent west-bank park land, and a relatively wide continuously vegetated corridor. The southern half of Reach 8 was given a moderate to high rating based upon a large number of viewers from the adjacent flea market parking lot and Berryessa Avenue, and a high degree of contrast of the narrow, but continuous riparian corridor with less visually appealing industrial and commercial surrounding land uses.

Reach 9 consists of a continuous, but narrow riparian corridor which is largely inaccessible for public visual access due to adjacent commercial and industrial land use. A moderate visual quality rating was assigned, based upon a wide view of the creek corridor from Mabury Road, and the moderate aesthetic value for employees of the adjacent businesses.

In Reach 10, the adjacent recreational vehicle storage yard and Mabury Service Yard afford little opportunity for public visual access to the corridor. However, the dense, continuous corridor provides contrast to the stark appearance of these facilities, and is of moderate visual value as viewed from Mabury Road.

Reach 11 was assigned a very high visual quality rating based upon the presence of many highly used access and recreation points, and a wide, continuous riparian corridor consisting of a diversity of dense vegetation within the corridor and along the tops of the banks.

CONCLUSION

The dense, nearly continuous riparian corridor of Coyote Creek provides dramatic contrast to the highly urban environment within the study area. Although public access is often restricted in areas of industrial and commercial land use, recreational opportunities and visual access in the form of bridges and parks occur frequently throughout the project area. The overall aesthetic value of the creek corridor ranges from moderate to high within the project area.

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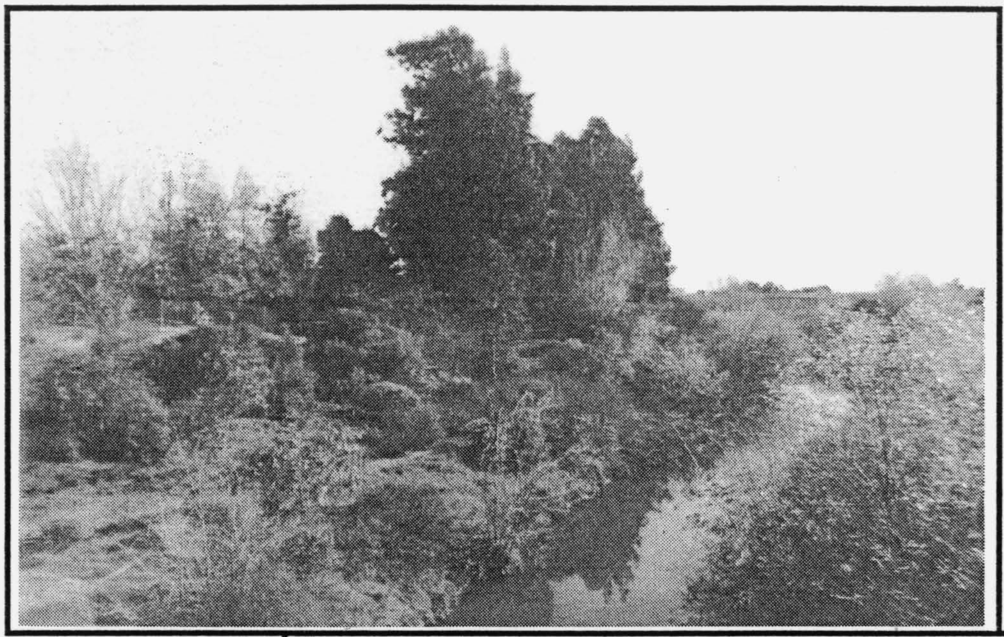
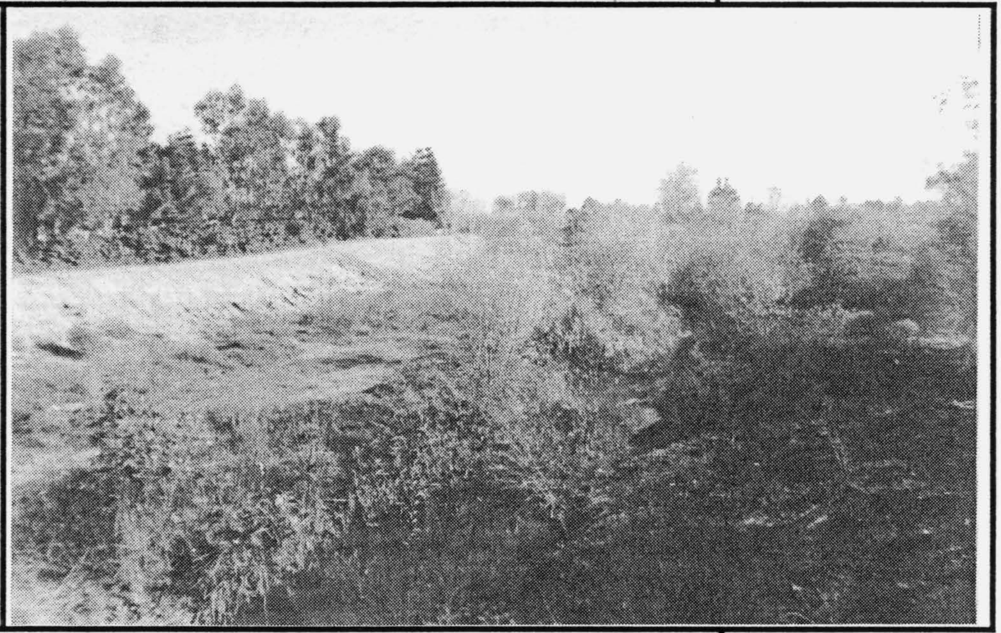


FIGURE 1
View of Coyote Creek channel south from Montague Expressway Bridge in Reach 4.

FIGURE 2
View of Coyote Creek channel south from Charcot Avenue Bridge in Reach 5.



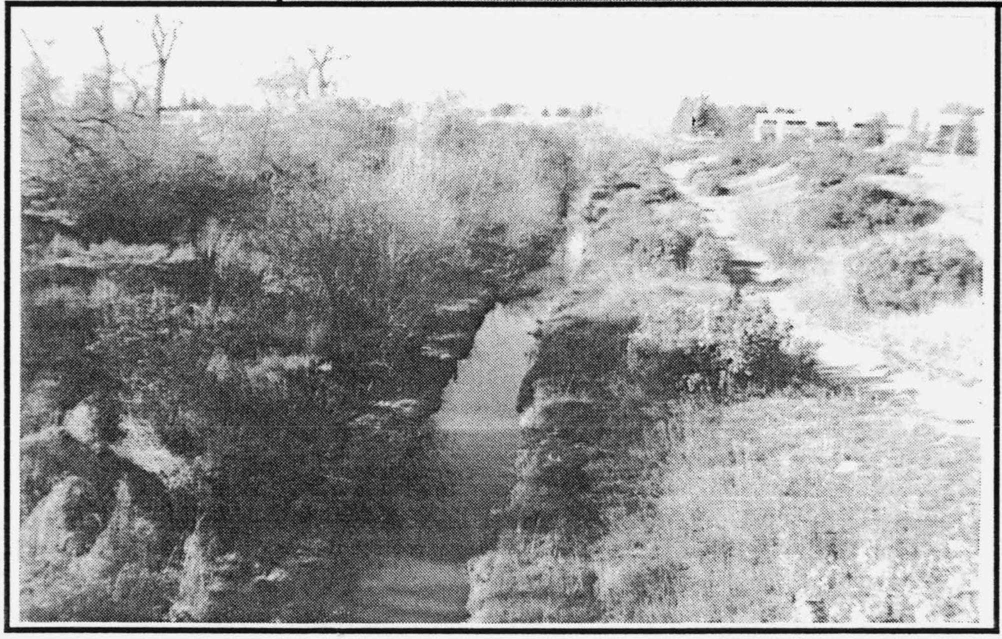


FIGURE 3
View of Coyote Creek north from O'Toole Lane Bridge in Reach 5.

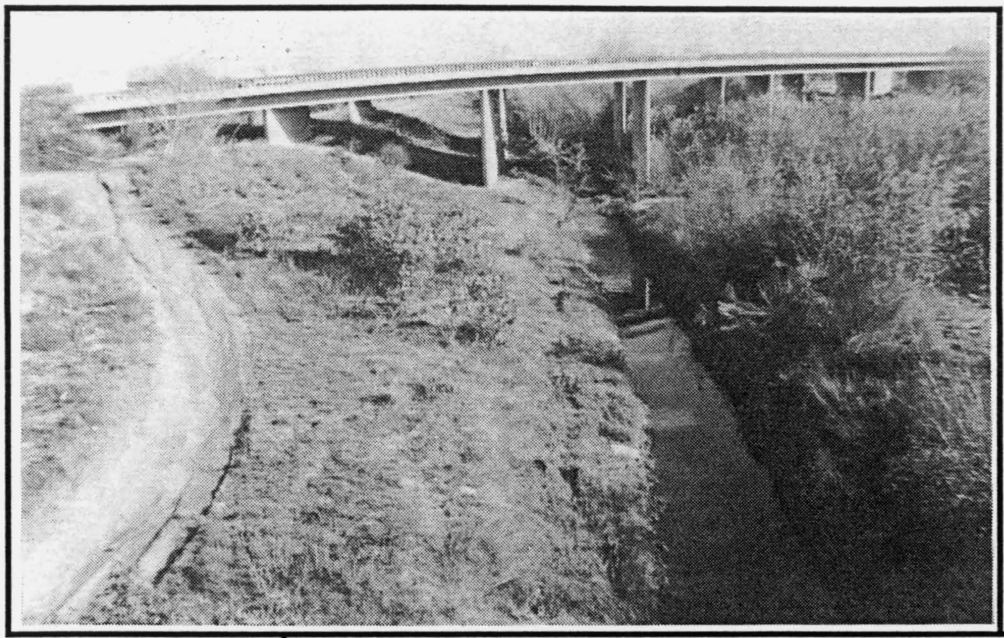
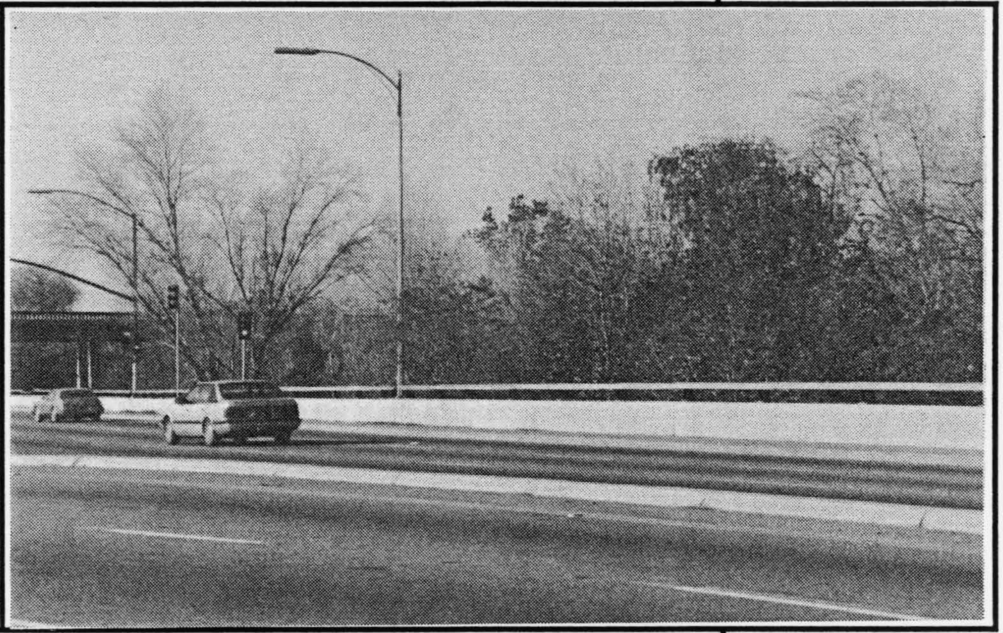


FIGURE 4
View of Coyote Creek from O'Toole Lane Bridge south toward Interstate 880 crossing in Reach 5.

FIGURE 5
Coyote Creek riparian vegetation adjacent to Brokaw Road in Reach 6.



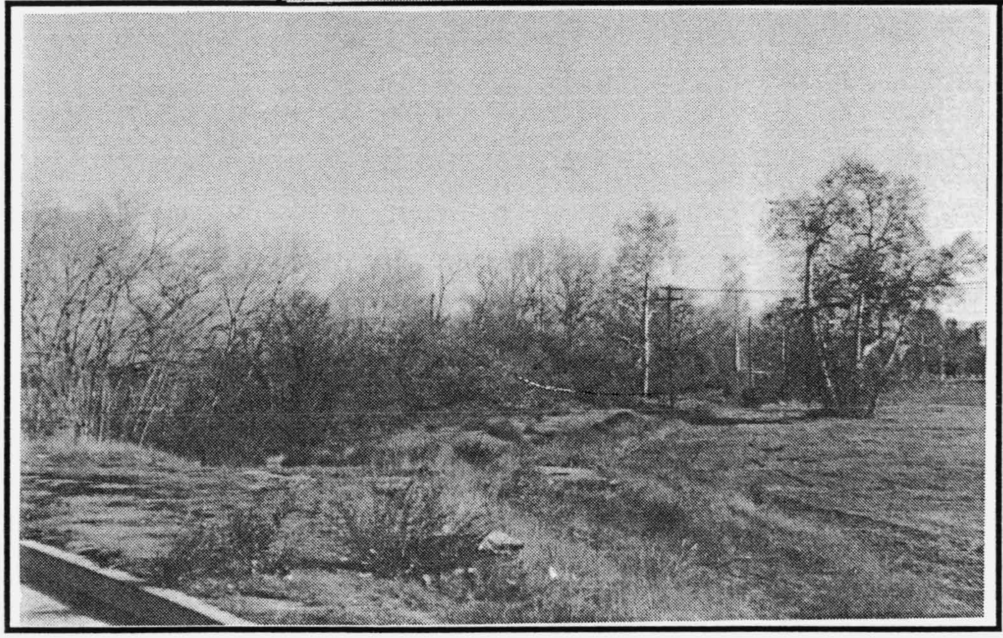


FIGURE 6
Coyote Creek riparian corridor south of Brokaw Road in Reach 6.

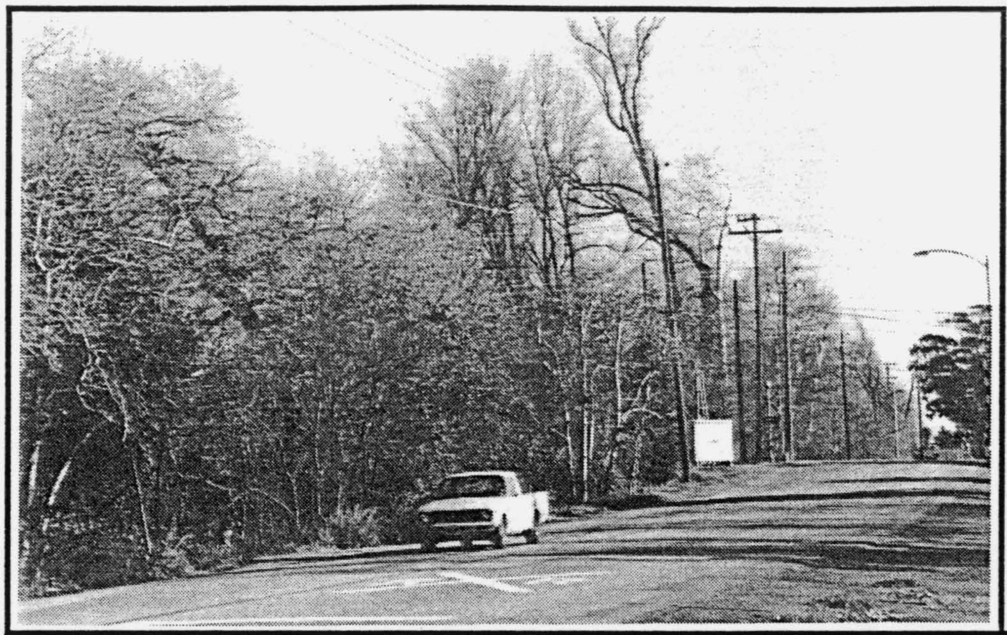
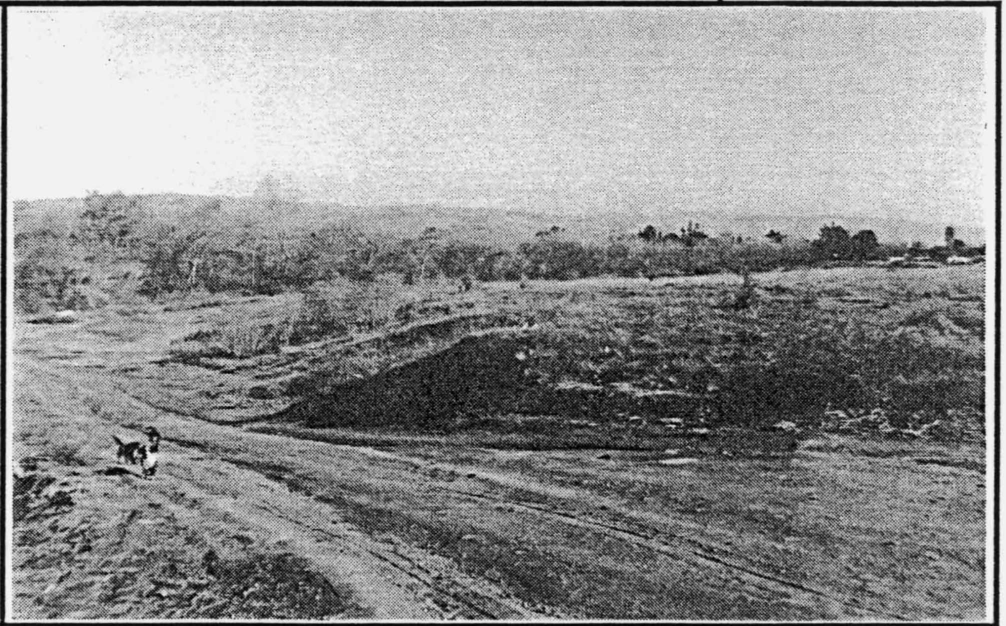


FIGURE 7
Coyote Creek adjacent to Schallenberger Drive in Reach 7.

FIGURE 8
Undeveloped park area adjacent to Coyote Creek on west side at Old Oakland Road in Reach 8.



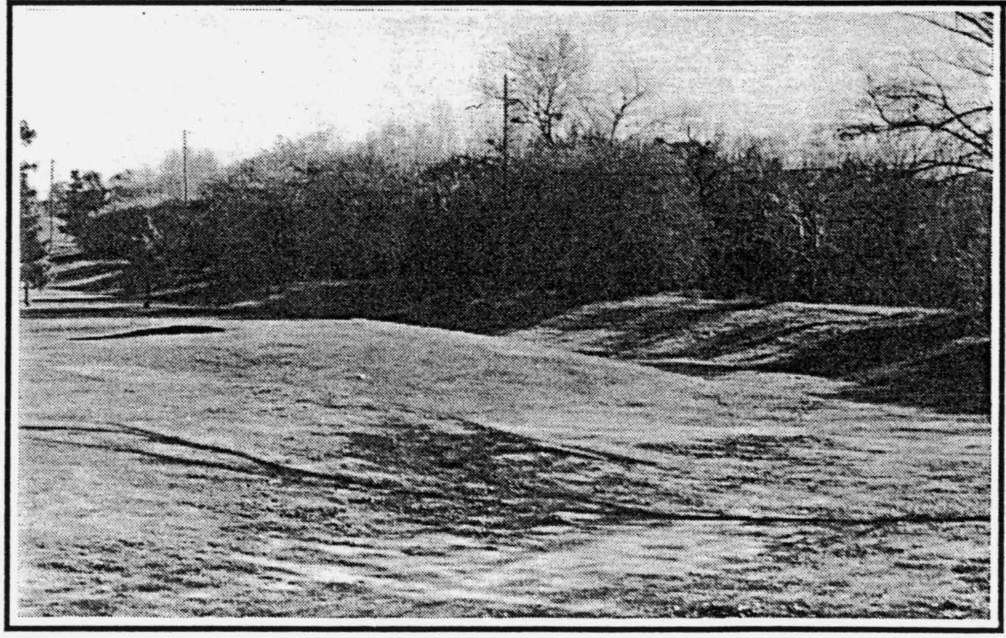


FIGURE 9
The east bank of Coyote Creek borders the San Jose Municipal Golf Course for approximately 3,600 feet in Reach 8.

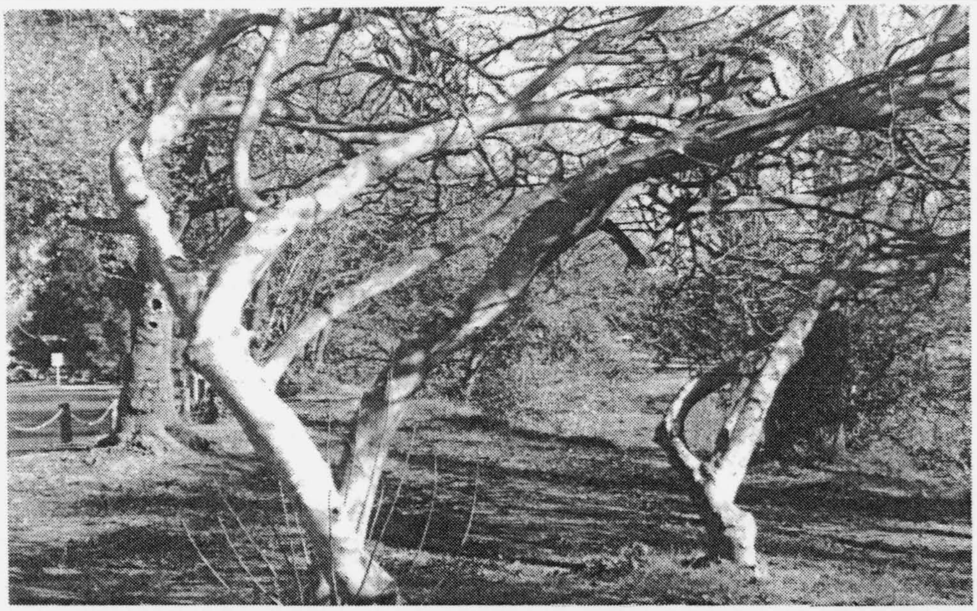


FIGURE 10
Summer deciduous buckeye trees and snags provide visual interest along the entrance road to the San Jose Municipal Golf Course in Reach 8.

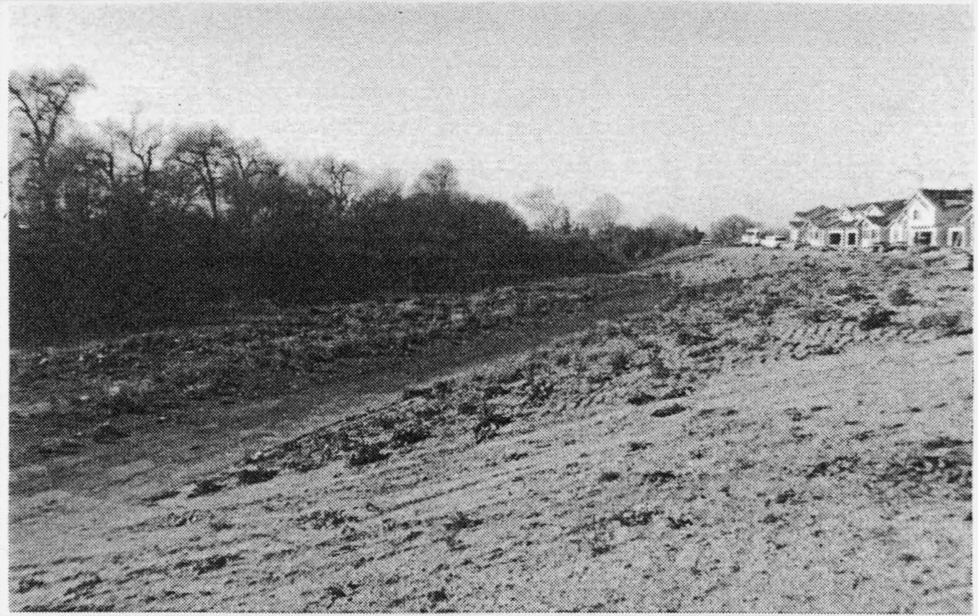


FIGURE 11
Residents of homes currently under construction on the east bank of Reach 8 will gain views of a disturbed but continuous riparian corridor.

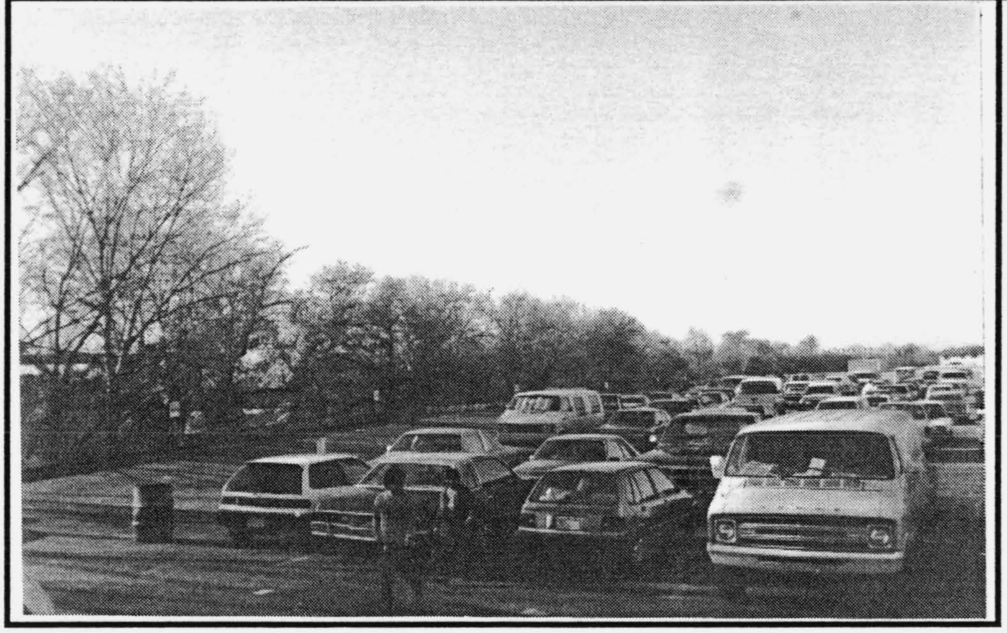


FIGURE 12
A narrow but continuous corridor of mature, riparian forest adjacent to the Flea Market parking lot as viewed from Berryessa Avenue in Reach 8.

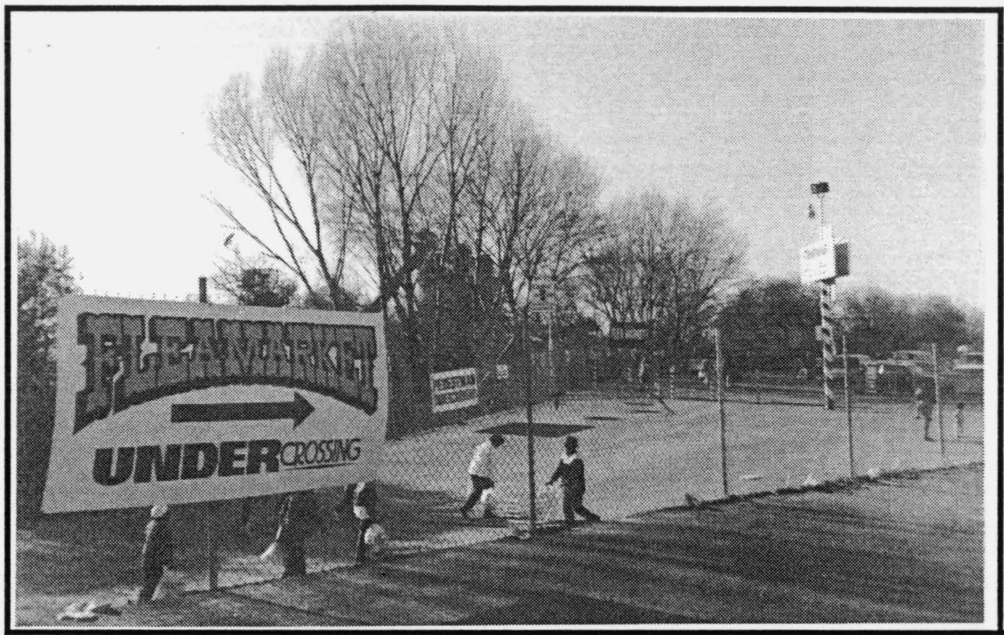


FIGURE 13
Pedestrian access from the parking lot to the Flea Market passes under Berryessa Avenue directly adjacent to the Coyote Creek corridor in Reach 9.

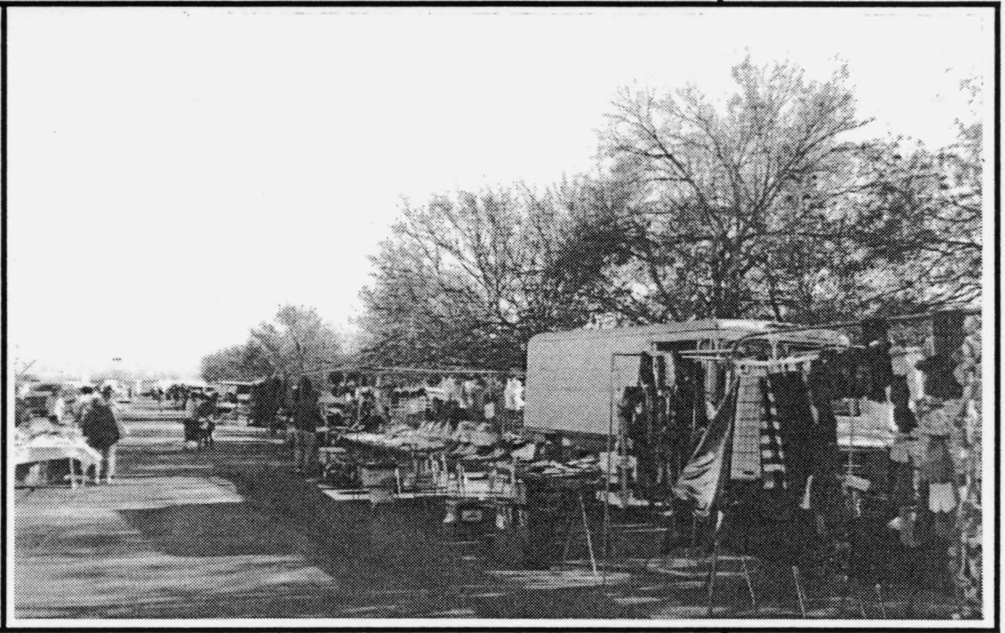


FIGURE 14
Patrons and sellers of the Flea Market in Reach 9 are provided views of the riparian corridor.

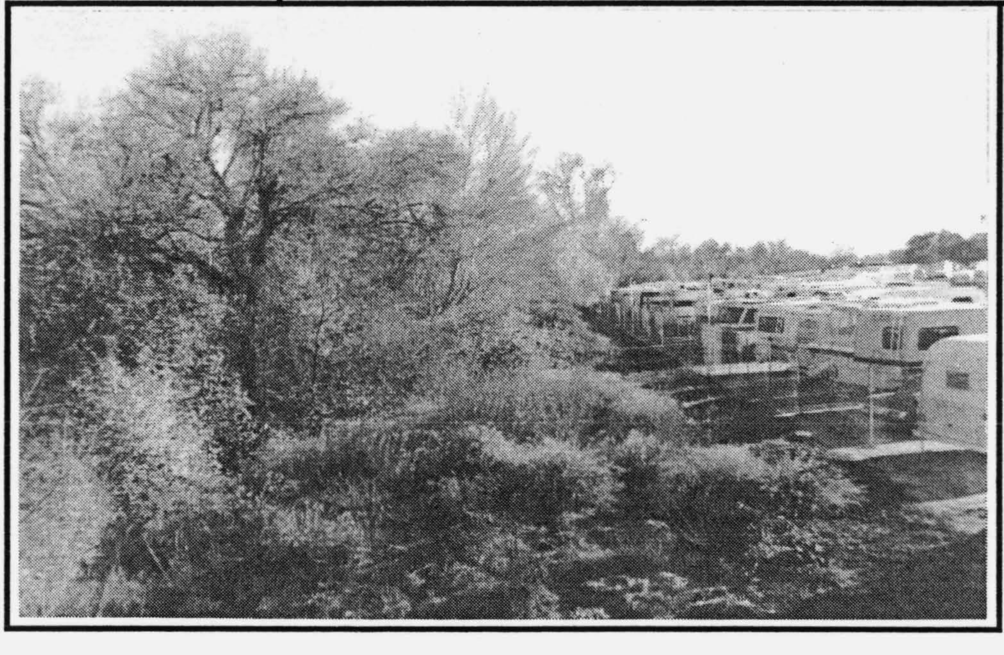


FIGURE 15
The natural corridor south of Mabury Road in Reach 10 contrasts with the stark apearance of a recreational storage facility on the west bank.

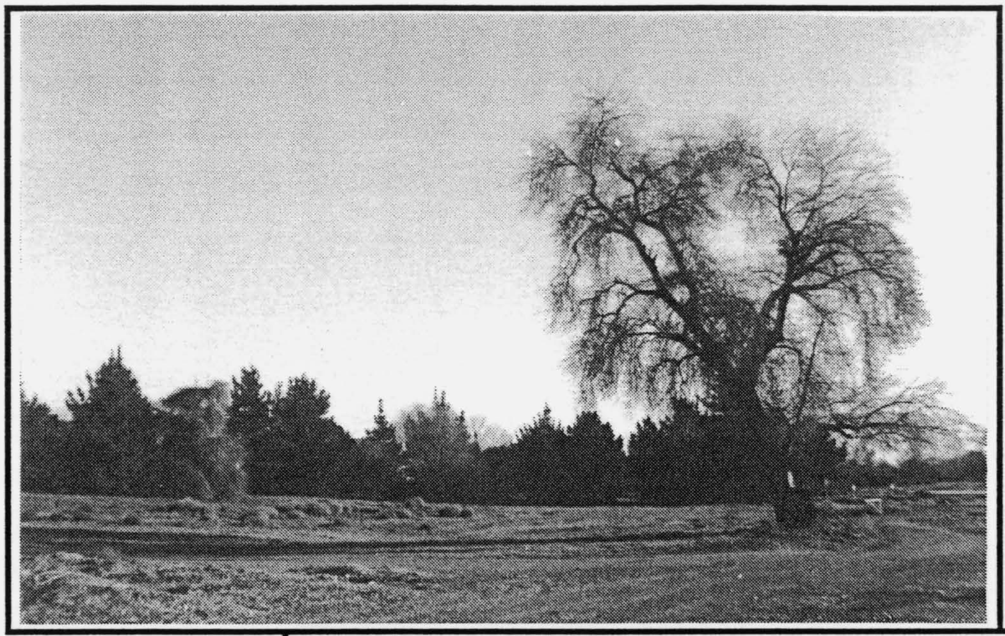
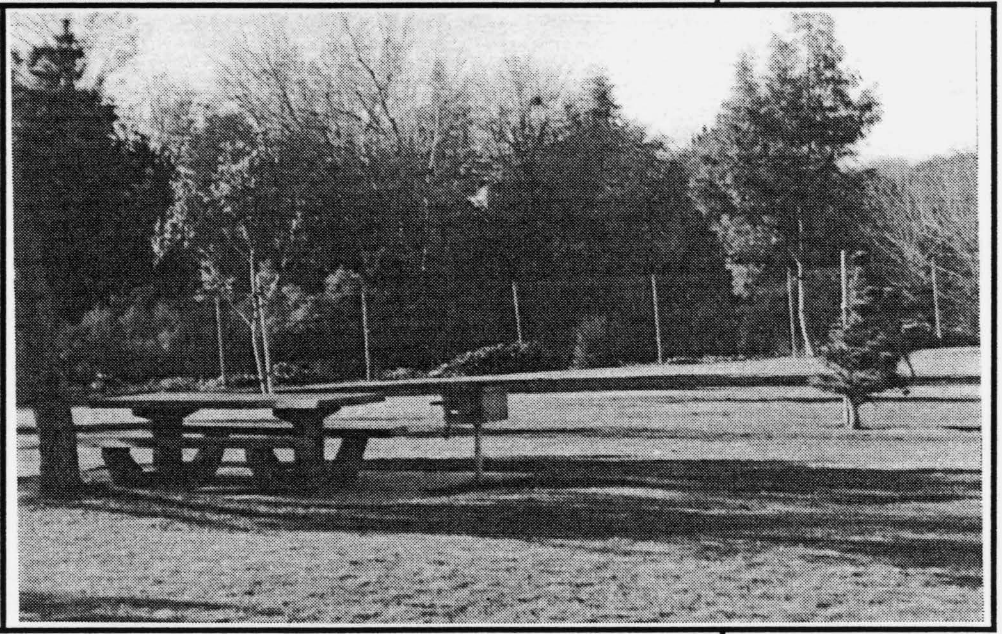


FIGURE 16
The Coyote Creek riparian corridor as viewed from the Fred Watson Community Center in Reach 11.

FIGURE 17
A picnic and park area on the east bank of Coyote Creek in Reach 11.



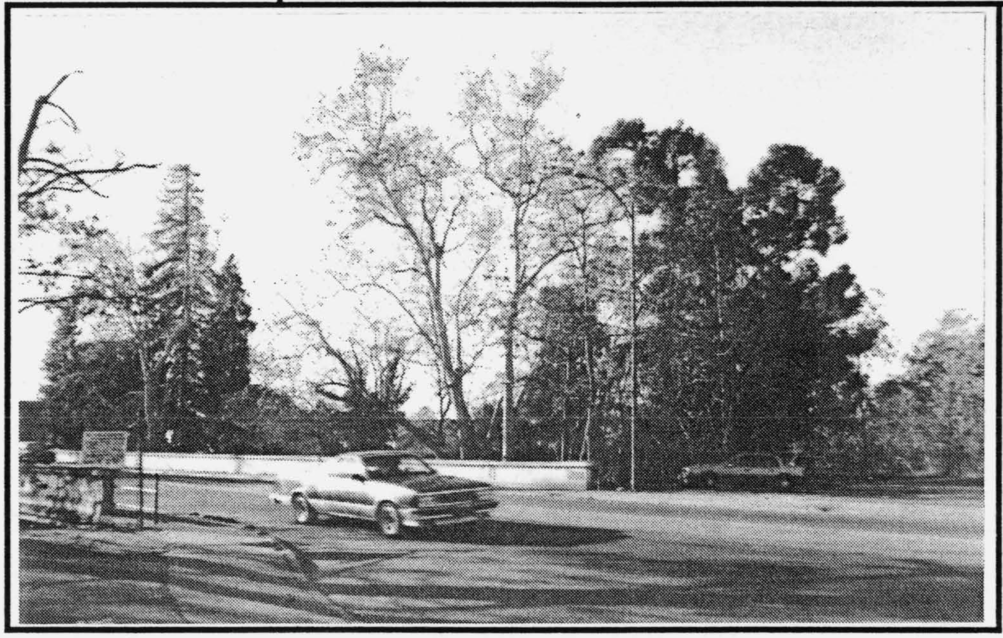


FIGURE 18
East Julian Street Bridge in Reach 11.